

Introduction to the Medieval Longsword

Part I



Written and used by:

The Chicago Swordplay Guild
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Introduction to Medieval Swordsmanship

Longsword Fundamentals

Course Overview:

The Medieval longsword, “langenschwert,” or “spada a due mani,” was a specialized form of the “knightly” cruciform sword that developed in the early 13th century. Although initially developed to combat reinforced mail armour, by the mid-15th century, the longsword had also become a civilian, “dueling” weapon in the city streets of Europe. This style of swordplay became so popular that fencing matches are recorded in Germany as late as the mid-18th century, two hundred years after the weapon’s usefulness on the battlefield had died out.

This *Introduction to the Medieval Longsword* presents universal principles taught with the longsword, while focusing on the medieval *Italian* tradition. The course is designed to provide the student with an intensive overview of the weapon and the basic techniques of its use. Upon completion of the course, the student will have a working knowledge with the historical terminology and techniques of the medieval masters, and will have been exposed to a wide variety of concepts, drills, and sparring sessions. This course presents the initial concepts that provide the framework for CSG Medieval and Renaissance swordsmanship, and is expanded upon in the Intermediate section.

Course Objectives:

Academic: To provide the student with a historical overview of the Medieval longsword, and its role in the history of historical swordsmanship.

Practical: To present a sequence of routines, methodologies, solo and partner drills, that will provide the groundwork for fighting with the longsword in a style derived from German and Northern Italian sources of the 14th through 17th centuries.

I. The Longsword

1.1 Origin of the Longsword

Prior to the 13th century, the principle knightly sword, was a straight, broad-bladed and double-edged weapon, about 39" (1m) long, and wielded in one hand. Used with a shield, this sword was primarily used from horseback as a back-up weapon once the lance was discarded, or on foot, by lightly armoured foot soldiers.

By the year 1200, however, several important changes had begun to appear in European armies. The first was the adoption of heavier crossbows and bows, capable of compromising the maille armour worn by knights. The second was the appearance of better-trained, often professional, foot soldiers, armed with heavier polearms than the simple spear. Third were new iron smelting and refining processes, making the production of steel plate cheaper and easier.

All of these factors began helped spur the development of plate armour – first the full helm, then joint protection, and then, by the 1250s, with the first rudimentary body defenses. Cavalry swords were already growing steadily longer, perhaps to deal with the greater preponderance of foot soldiers. But at the same time that the knight's improving armour made it possible for him to rely on his shield less, that armour also required him to use a sword better suited to defeat it. Thus, the first longswords were born.

1.2 Evolution of the Longsword



The medieval longsword went through many changes throughout its history. The sword to the left reflects the sword as it first appeared in the 13th century. It was a primarily a cutting weapon, with a fuller to make it lighter and to strengthen the blade. The tip was not as prominent as its future brothers, but deadly. It should be noted that the longsword was used primarily to combat the armor of the time: riveted maille.

The second sword from the left has a slightly more tapered point. This shifted the weight of the sword back slightly towards the hands, and making the point more prominent. This sword form appeared by the late 13th century, and continued through the medieval and Renaissance period.

The changes in the third sword are easy to notice. The blade tapers sharply from the crossguard all the way to the point, into an almost triangular shape. As plate armour became to rapidly develop in the 14th century, this form of sword was particularly suited to thrusting into the armour's gaps and articulations. Swords of this form began to appear around 1350.

The fourth sword from the left is a major transition for the medieval longsword. Risers replace the fullers, making the sword more rigid, and thereby better suited to thrusting. Swords of this form became popular by the late 14th century, and became one of the dominant longsword forms in the following century

First appearing in the 15th century, the last sword is one of the final stages of longsword development. Notice the shoulder near the cross. This was often very dull to allow the index finger to wrap over the cross. This allowed for much better point control. Thrusting has now become the main focus of the weapon. By the end of the 15th century, and into the 16th, sword cutlers began to add a variety of side and finger rings to protect the hands, and this lighter, slimmer weapon also became popular in civilian dress, and in the new "fashion" of civilian dueling.

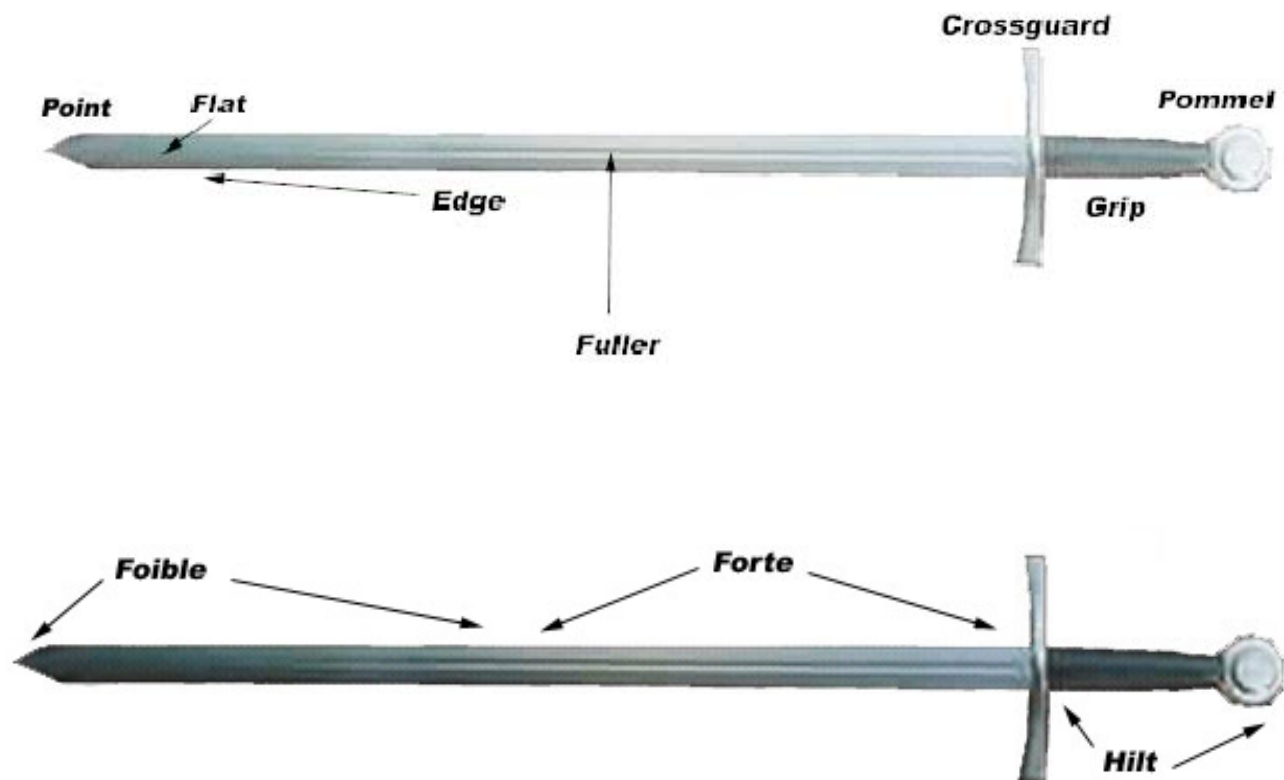
In the 16th century, both tapered and broad-bladed longswords remained popular, but the longsword's utility on the battlefield was nearly over, and the rapier had supplanted its popularity in civilian life. In the street melee that opens *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare has old Montague call for his longsword, as a way of portraying him as old-fashioned, and even buffoonish.

1.2 Anatomy of the Longsword

Length and Weight: There are two principal forms of longsword. The first is usually about 46 – 50 inches long, with a weight between 2.5 and 4 lbs. This sort of weapon was generally carried in battle, when traveling, or in the late medieval era, as a civilian weapon.

The second form of longsword was about 54 inches long (the usual measurement was that the pommel should fit under the crook of the armpit), with a weight of 3 – 5 lbs. This was specifically a battlefield weapon, and was carried suspended from the saddle, not worn on the body.

Divisions of the longsword:



Point – Or tip of the longsword for both thrusting, and slicing.

Flat – The flexible plane of the sword that “connects” the edges. The flat is also used for parrying.

Edge – The juncture of the two flats, with which the sword cuts. There are 2 edges: True and False. They are sharp like an axe, not a knife.

Fuller/Riser – The spine of the sword. A *fuller* is a shallow groove that runs down each flat, along the sword’s spine. The fuller strengthens and lightens the sword for cutting. Note that some swords, particularly those designed to emphasize the thrust, do not have a fuller, but rather have a wide, diamond cross-sectioned blade. This thicker “spine” makes the sword stiffer, and is called a *riser*.

Crossguard – The steel bar that protects the hands from an opponent’s blade, and is also used offensively to hook and bind the opponent’s weapon.

Grip – Made of wood, sometimes wrapped in leather or thin metal wire for keeping the hands from slipping.

Pommel – Screws into the tang of the sword, holding the whole thing together.

Foible – Cutting section of the sword, also called the “weak” of the blade.

Forte – Called the “strong” of the sword, this section is used to defend sword blows.

Hilt – Composed of the crossguard, pommel and grip.

II. Longsword Stance, Grip and Footwork

2.1 Basic Stance

To understand the basic longsword stance, try this analogy: Stand with your feet parallel, and shoulder width apart. Step forward as if to grab a doorknob, or to shake hands.

Checkpoints – When fighting in the medieval style, there are certain concepts that you should keep in mind, to make sure that your stance is true, and you are not off balance.



Basic Stance: Left foot lead

- 1) Feet are shoulder width apart
- 2) Knees are slightly bent
- 3) Shoulders are mostly squared to your opponent (don't profile)
- 4) Keep your back straight

Trick – Place a waster or sword pointing straight back between your feet. If your feet are wide enough apart, they won't touch the sword.



Basic Stance: Right foot lead

2.2 Gripping the Longsword



- 1) Your primary hand should be flush or slightly back from the crossguard.
- 2) The second hand rests just above the pommel, or over the pommel if size dictates
- 3) Only grip tightly with the thumb, and first two fingers. As the sword is swung, the last two fingers will clench, to begin the cutting arc.

2.3 Footwork

Controlled, natural and elegant footwork is the foundation of good swordsmanship, and can never be practiced enough.

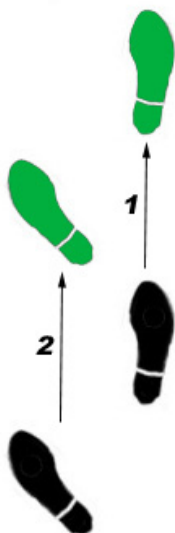
There are 4 classes of footwork used in medieval swordplay:

- 1) Gathering Step
- 2) Passing Step
- 3) Half Pace
- 4) Compass Pace

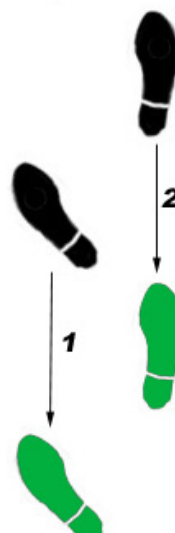
In the following diagrams, the darker sets of prints are your starting position. The lighter footprints are your ending position.

#1 The Gathering Step: Moving both feet in the same direction, where the feet never cross.

Gather Forward

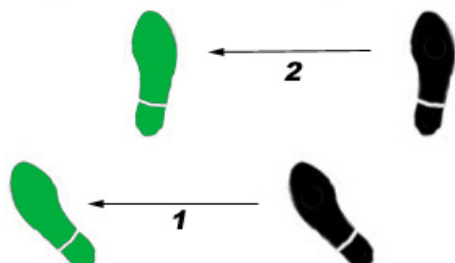


Gather Back

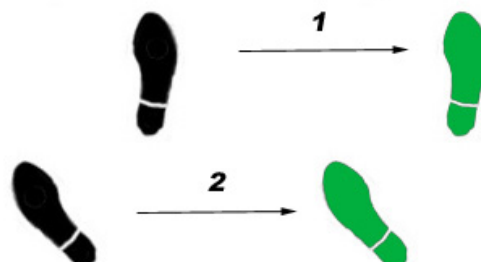


Lateral movement is called “traversing.” Because your feet don’t cross, it is placed in the category of gathering footwork.

Traverse Left

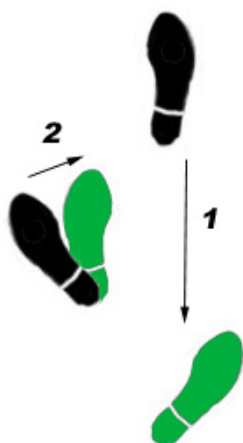


Traverse Right



#2 The Passing Step: One foot passing the other in an attempt to gain or lose ground on your opponent.

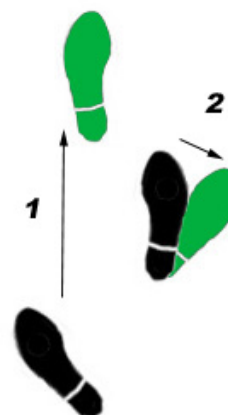
Pass Back



When passing forward or back, the previously rear foot ends up in front.

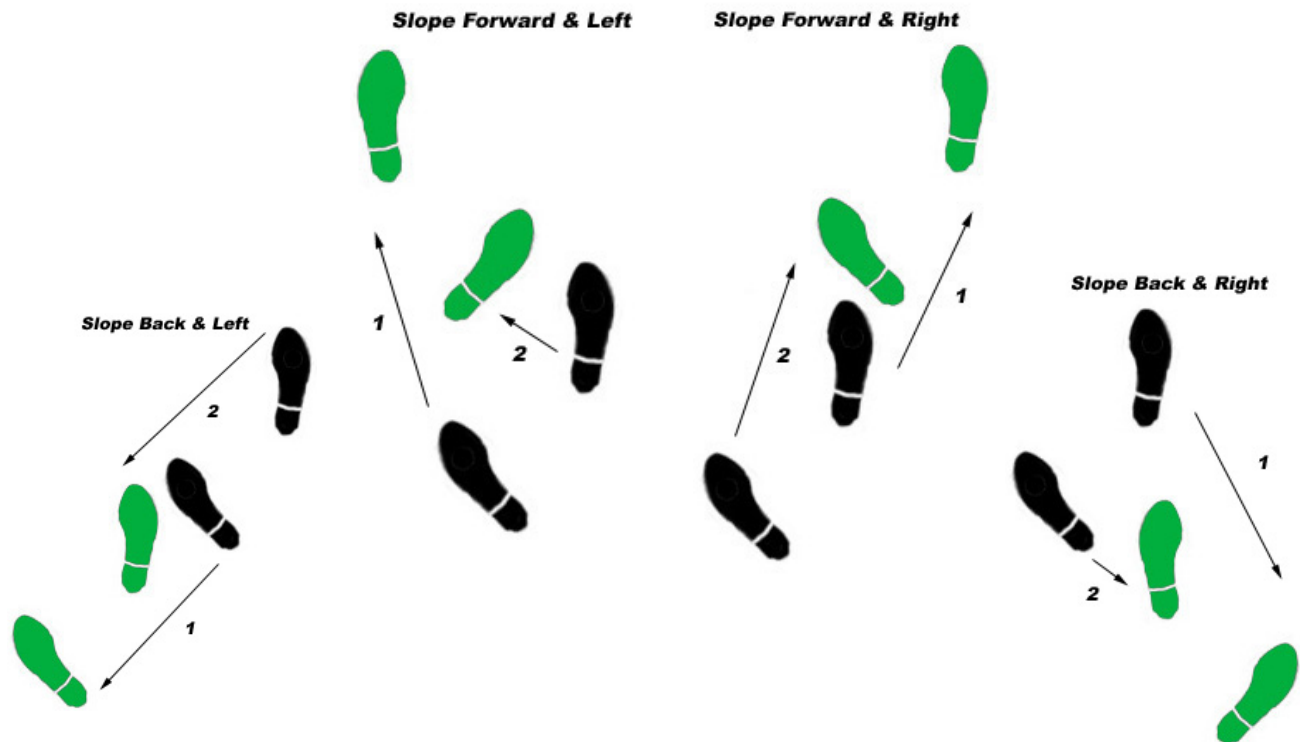
Passing footwork is “natural” footwork, in that it is basically walking with the sword. Yet when we simply walk, we are often horribly off-balance; simply letting our body fall forward while our feet catch-up. Passing footwork, even when done quickly, is balanced and deliberate.

Pass Forward



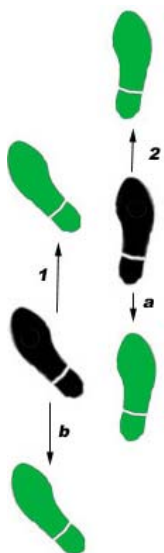
Moving diagonally, usually in an attempt to flank your opponent, is known as “sloping.” This is a combination of passing steps, and gathering steps. These examples that are shown start off with the right foot forward. If your left foot is forward, the same rules apply to the footwork, only reversed.

Notice that when your right foot is forward and you slope forward-left, the left foot ends up in the lead. That prevents your feet from crossing, and making your footwork unstable. Footwork is one of the bases of swordsmanship, without a solid base, all the higher techniques of swordplay will be unstable and most likely will not be as effective.



Sloping back is one of the hardest pieces of footwork to master. It is cautious in nature, because while retreating you don't have the luxury of seeing the terrain behind you. You have to “feel” the ground as you step, or you risk slipping, tripping, or worse yet, falling down in combat.

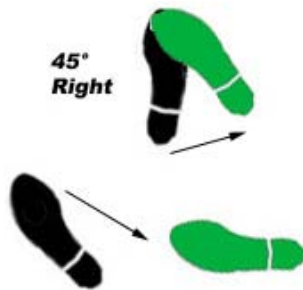
#3 The Half Pace: While very similar to a gathering step, this step is different enough, and important enough to be mentioned in a number of historical manuals.



When advancing, the trailing leg is brought almost even with the front leg and THEN the lead leg advances. When retreating, the lead leg is now brought in, and then the rear leg steps out. The major differences between the half pace and advancing steps are:

- The half pace is less stable than the gathering step. Bringing your feet together is a risky maneuver, especially in armor. All of your body weight is centered in one spot, making you vulnerable to being knocked off balance.
- The half pace is subtler, and thus harder for your opponent to notice
- The half pace is quicker to perform.

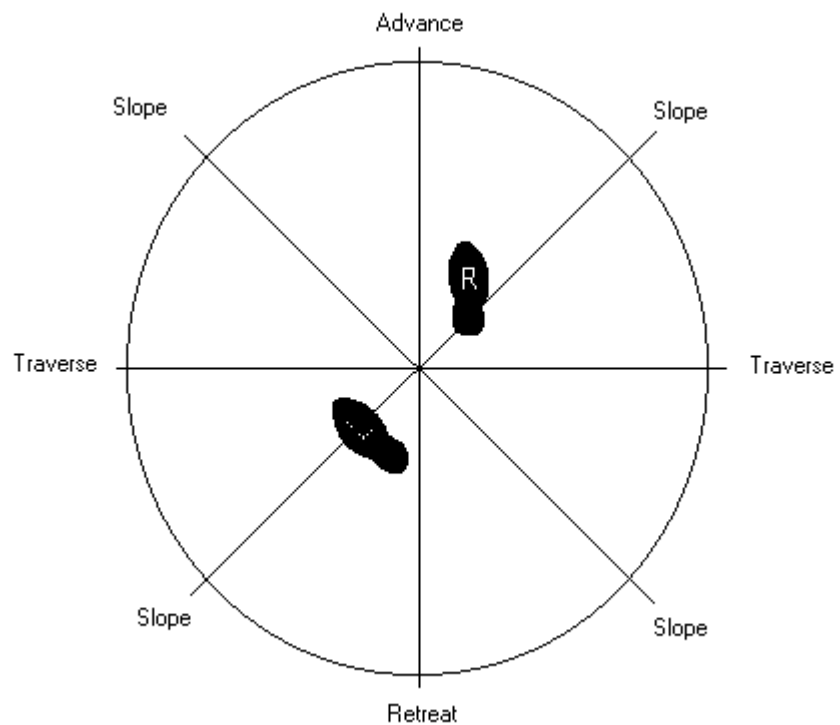
#4 The Compass Pace: Effectively pivoting to change your facing in combat. This technique is often used in conjunction with the slope pace.



Notice how the front foot stays in place while the rear foot swings around the outside. Compass paces can be any size. The example shown here is a 45-degree compass pace.

The idea of 8 directions of movement is a recurring concept in medieval swordsmanship.

This diagram (called in Italian a *segno*, or “sign”) shows you the directions of movement in your footwork drills. These terms are universal in Medieval Swordsmanship.



III. The Guardia of the Longsword

Each Italian master had a similar yet distinct series of guards or *postae* (“stations/seats”) for the longsword. These *postae* don’t really “guard” anything. Rather, they are the natural starting and ending points of the eight cuts and four thrusts (see below) of the longsword. As such, they are also interconnected; the swordsman will flow from *postae* to *postae* in the course of a sword fight. Each guard *does* make it naturally difficult to strike one target, while leaving another area inherently vulnerable. A good swordsman understands this relationship, and uses it to manipulate his opponent to attack where he desires. For example, the Half Iron Door makes it difficult to strike the legs, while seemingly leaving the head vulnerable. A knowing this, a good swordsman will anticipate an attack to the head, and be able to instantly lift his sword in such a way as to parry the blow, and leave his adversary vulnerable. See *Basic Counters #4* and *5*, below.

The following guardia are (with one exception), taken from the earliest known Italian fencing manuscript, the *Flos Duellatorum* (“Flower of Battle”) of Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco. The one additional guard, *Posta Falcone*, was added by a later master of Fiore’s tradition – Filippo Vadi.

3.1 Guardia Progression Drill

The following drill not only teaches the guards of the longswords, but will also help you to understand their interconnectedness.

(Note: The illustrations on the left are from the Pissani-Dossi MS of the *Flos Duellatorum*, c. 1430, while those on the right are from the earlier Getty manuscript of 1409.)

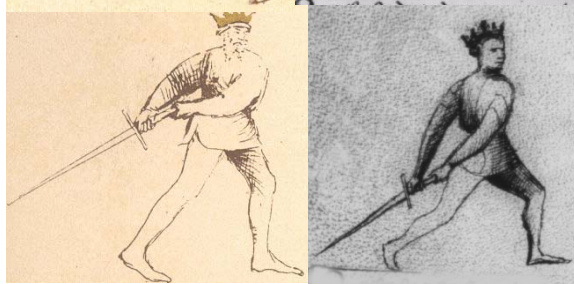


Half Iron Door (*Porta di Ferro Mezzana*)

Begin in the Iron Door. Your sword is along your centerline. This guard exposes your upper body to attack, but it is very easy to make deflections from here. This is the first invitational guard.

Tail Guard (*Posta Coda Longa e Distessa*)

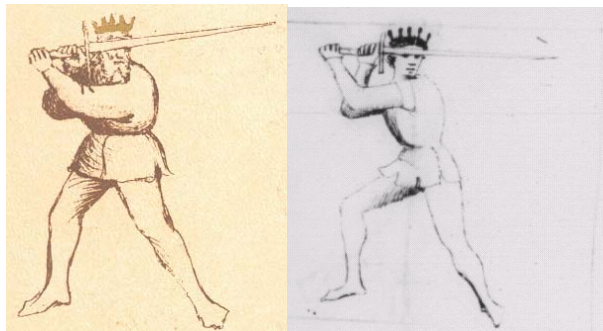
Pass forward with your left leg, and turn the tip of your blade behind your trailing leg. This invites your opponent to attack you anywhere on your body, but distorts their judgment as far as range is concerned.



Falcon Guard (*Posta Falcone*)

Pass forward with the right leg, and slide your hands up to just above your head. Tilt the blade back between 30 and 45 degrees. You are now in Falcon Guard. Strong cuts are made from here, and it also invites the opponent to attack your legs and torso. This is the *postae* added by Filippo Vadi.

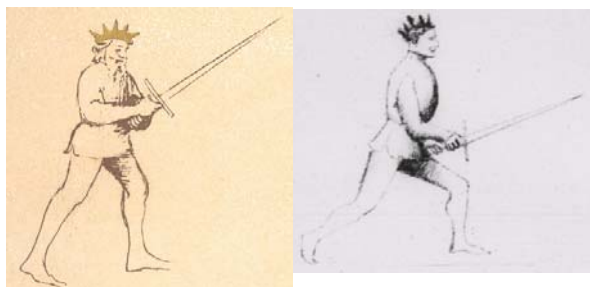




Window Guards (Posta Finestra)

Pass forward with your left foot. Cross your wrists and drop your point into this Window Guard. This guard is both offensive and defensive. You can parry blows to the side, but you threaten the thrust at the same time.

Pass forward with your right foot, thrusting forward with the sword, and pull into the right Window Guard. Your hands are now on the left side, and your wrists don't cross.



Short Guard (Posta Breve)

Pass forward and with a moulinet, and cut into Short Guard. Here you protect your body the most, and you can move to any other guard.

Crown Guard (Frontale o Corona)

Pass forward and parry an imaginary thrust into the Crown Guard, right foot forward. This guard is used for parrying thrusts and is held in front of the body. Fiore dei Liberi also has a number of techniques where the strong of the blade, and the cross are used to parry fendenti in this guard.



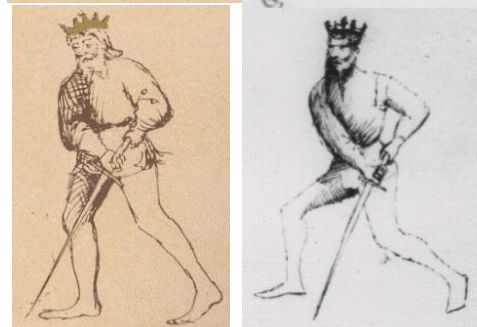
Guard of the Woman (Posta di Donna)

Step Forward, and sling your blade over your right shoulder. Your strongest cuts come from this position, but so do some of your most reliable defenses. By simply stepping forward, and dropping the tip of your sword behind your back, you shut down your whole right side from attacks.



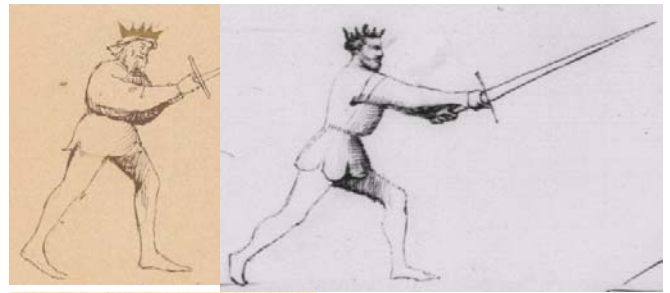
Boar's Tooth Guard (Denti di Chinghiare)

Pass forward, and cut squalembretto, your sword ends up here: This "Boar's Tooth" guard is used mainly for the thrust from below. A quick change of wrist positions, and you have a very powerful, and fast thrust from a seemingly harmless guard.



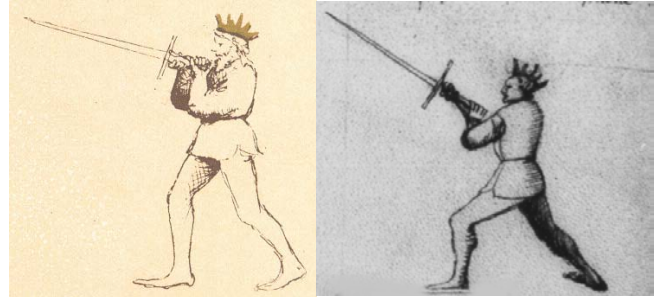
Long Guard (Posta Longa)

Pass forward, and thrust out with your arms. Primarily used to keep your opponent away, this guard is also where your thrusts end up. The variants come from the placement of your edge. You can carry this guard either with the flat facing the ground, or the edge.



Two Horned Guard (Posta di Bicornu)

Pass forward and pull back your arms so your elbows almost touch your hipbones. You are now in the Two Horned Guard. At first, this seems an awkward guard, but do not be fooled! From here, you can easily roll into a quick thrust or cut.



Full Iron Door (Tutta Porta di Ferro)

Pass forward and drop into the Gate of All Iron. This is the best guard to deflect all attacks from above. Also, the Full Iron Door can maneuver itself into a Posta di Donna with no difficulty, making this the most solid defensive guard for descending cuts, despite its looks.



3.2 Qualities of the Italian Guards.

Master Fiore places his guards into 3 distinct categories based on how they are used in combat.

Stabile

- Half Iron Door
- Tail
- Short
- Boar's Tooth

Instabile

- Window
- Crown
- Long
- 2 Horned

Pulsatina

- Falcon**
- Woman's Guard
- Full Iron Door

**Falcon guard was introduced by Vadi, and was not placed into a category by Fiore dei Liberi. However, it has the same offensive qualities as the Woman's Guard, and is thus listed here as a *pulsatina* guard.

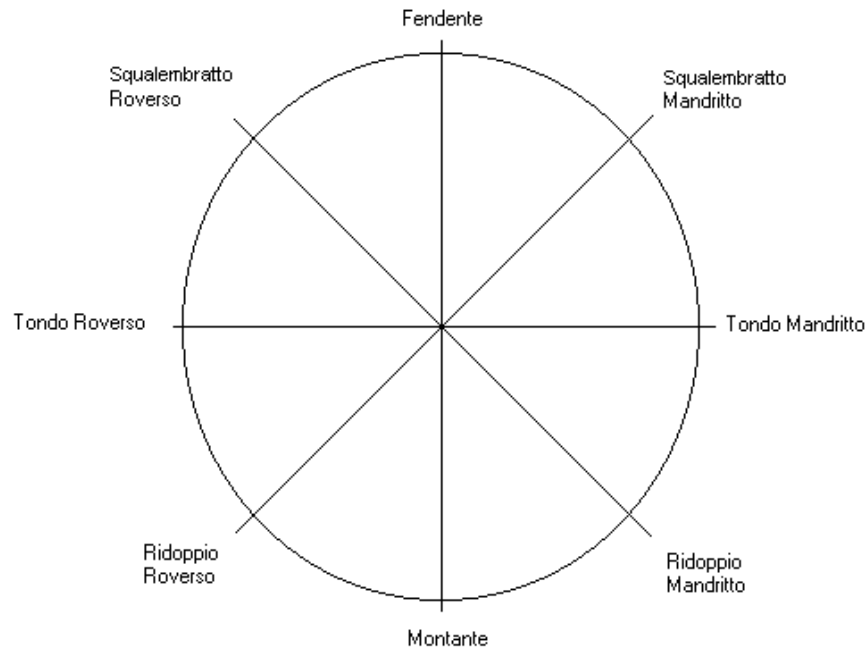
Stabile – are guards in which the swordsman may safely stand and hold his ground.

Instabile – are transitional guards the swordsman moves through, but is not advised to stand in.

Pulsatina – The word *pulsatina* is derived from an archaic Latin verb for “to smite.” Thus, pulsatina guards are guards particularly framed for striking heavy blows.

IV. Offense with the Longsword

4.1 Cut directions and names (The *Segno*)



Each cut direction has a different name.

Fendente – From above straight down. Literally translated “To the teeth.”

Montante – From below straight up.

Tondo – Any horizontal cut.

Squalembretto – Diagonal cut from above.

Ridoppio – Diagonal cut from below.

Thrusting: There are 4 types of thrusts, each designated by the position of the hands when making them. All thrusts are known as “punta” but they can be more specifically defined, based on the direction from which the thrust comes:

Punta Mandritta: A thrust where the primary hand (right if right handed) is palm down.

Punta Roversa: A thrust where the primary hand is palm up.

Stocatta: A thrust from below

Inbrocatta: A thrust from above

4.2 The Four Quarters

The human body is divided into 4 parts, each one taking on 2 of the following target areas:

High – Strikes that are aimed above the belt line

Low – Strikes aimed below the hipline

Inside the Sword: The area between the shoulders where all the vital organs are kept:

Head, torso, and groin. Also known as your opponent’s “center.” This area is where all lethal thrusts are aimed, and where most of your devastating cuts should land

Outside the Sword: Your opponent’s limbs or flanks. Less direct access to vital areas, but if you can move to the outside you have successfully flanked your opponent, and are less likely to be struck yourself.

4.3 Interconnectedness between Cuts and Guards

As discussed under the Guardia (Section 2, above), all cuts and thrusts begin and end in a guard.

Fendente – Begin in Falcon and ends in Half Iron Door

Montante – Begin in Half Iron Door and ends in Falcon(false edge)

Tondo – Begin in Woman's Guard and ends in Window or Woman's on the other side

Squalembretto - Begin in Falcon or Woman's and ends in Boar's Tooth(mandritta) or Tail(roverso)

Ridoppio – Begin in Tail and ends in Window

Thrusts from below – Begin in either Short, Boar's Tooth, or Half Iron Door and finish in Long Guard

Thrusts from Above – Begin in Window and end in a position similar to Long Guard.

4.4 Basic Cutting Drills

These are good drills to get you used to how your sword and body move with each other.

1. Fendente – Straight Down

From your Short Guard, right foot leads, gather forward, rise into Falcon Guard, and cut fendente to Short Guard, and repeat. It is important to note that when you make a step, you are rising into Falcon Guard and cutting all in that single step. This can be confusing to some people who are used to the idea of blocking with one step, and cutting with another. To do this drill on the reverse, retreat by moving your back leg first, raising into Falcon and cutting fendente. Repeat.

2. Montante into Fendente – Compound Cut from Half Iron Door

Start with your right foot forward in Half Iron Door. While lifting your right foot to make your advancing step forward (and slightly to the right), cut up from Half Iron Door to Falcon. You are attempting to “snipe” your opponent's wrists with the false edge of your sword. As you are replacing your right foot, cut fendente to your opponent's head, repeat. On the reverse, cut up while moving the rear leg, and cut down while recovering the front leg.

3. Squalembri from Short Guard (Walking cuts - advance then retreat)

Begin in a Woman's Guard, left foot lead, pass forward with your right foot, and cut squalembretto from right to left. Your cut ends in Boar's Tooth. Pass forward with the left foot, and in one motion, recover your blade to a left Woman's Guard, and cut roverso squalembretto to the opponent's neck. This cut ends in Tail Guard.

4. Squalembri from Short Guard with hangers (advancing cut into a retreating cut)

From Short Guard (right foot forward), step forward with your right foot in a gathering step, and cut from right to left in a downward slant (think of targeting the side of the neck, if it helps). Now, with your left foot, make a *slight* step back with your rear (left) foot to regain the appropriate 60%/40% balance ratio. Next, make a passing retreat with your front foot (right) and cut roverso squalembretto or left to right diagonal. End in a Short Guard, and you have completed the drill.

5. Squalembri from Tail Guard (traverse and cut the wrists)

From the Tail Guard, traverse right with the right foot. This moves you out of danger from an incoming cut. As you begin your squalembritto cut, pass back with your left foot. Your cut ends in Boar's Tooth. Switch to a left Tail Guard. From the Left Tail Guard, traverse left with the left foot. As you begin your roverso squalembritto cut, pass back with your right foot. Your cut ends in Tail Guard.

6. Ridoppio from tail – Multiple diagonal cuts from below

Start in Tail Guard. Pass forward and cut in an upward arc from right to left, targeting anywhere on the opponent's left side. Your cut ends in a left Window Guard. Recover to a LEFT Tail Guard (very strange feeling) and immediately pass forward and cut in an upward arc from left to right. Stop your cut in a right Window Guard and recover to a Tail Guard. You are ready to repeat.

7. Compound cuts – Ridoppio to squalembritto

From the Tail Guard, step forward with your right leg make a ridoppio rising cut from right to left. Your cut finishes in a left Window Guard. Immediately after, pass back with the right foot, and cut roverso squalembritto (diagonally from left to right), down to your opponent's shoulder/neck.

8. Tondo cuts

Start in a Woman's Guard, left leg front, sword slung over your right shoulder. Pass forward with the right foot and make a horizontal cut (tondo) targeting your opponent's left side. Recover your sword to a left Woman's Guard. Pass forward and cut horizontal (roverso tondo) to your opponent's right side. Recover to Woman's Guard, and you are ready to continue.

Moulinet drill:

This drill is an excellent way to train your body to flow through cuts, instead of trying to cut, stop, and cut again.

Start in a Short Guard with your left foot forward. Take a right step, and make a squalembretto cut, finishing in a Boar's Tooth guard.

Recover through a left Tail Guard, pass forward with the left foot, and make your second cut a roverso squalembretto. Recover your blade all the way into the Tail Guard.

Cut ridoppio to the hip. This cut finishes in a left Window Guard.

From the Window Guard, swing the tip upwards, and circle around through the left Tail Guard, and cut roverso ridoppio to the other hip. Finish in a right Window Guard.

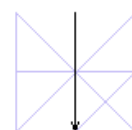
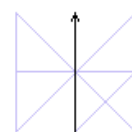
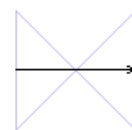
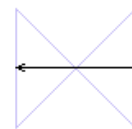
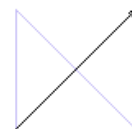
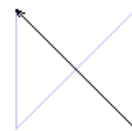
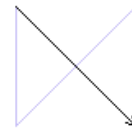
Cut tondo to the opponent's elbow, finishing in a left Woman's Guard.

Cut roverso tondo to the other elbow, and recover to a right Woman's Guard.

Turn your sword through a Tail Guard, and cut straight up, or montante, to the groin, or to the underside of the chin. This cut easily is turned into Posta Falcone.

Finish your drill by cutting fendente (straight down) to your imaginary opponent's head, splitting his skull "to the teeth" ending in Half Iron Door.

NOTE: All footwork in this drill is done with passing steps.



V. Defensive Counters with the Longsword

Once the student has learned how to move, cut, and thrust with the longsword, the principles of defense, both parries and counter-attacks can be taught through partner drills. These partner drills are *set-plays*: prearranged sequences that teach a core technique of medieval swordsmanship. The following 14 set-plays teach some of the most efficient responses from a variety of guardia against common attacks from that an equal variety of guardia. Mastery of these basic counters is critical to truly learning how to fight with the longsword.

5.1 Basic counters for cuts from above:

Note: The following format should be observed when training any partner drill:

- Face each other and salute.
- Both the attacker and defender are to start one step out of distance.
- The Patient Agent (the receiver of the initial attack) should signify his or her readiness to the Agent (the executor of the initial attack) with a nod. *No nod, no attack.*
- The Agent's Attack should be on-target, but *controlled*, so it does not hit them if they fail to evade or parry.
- When finished, salute and shake hands.

1) Scalp Cut from Falcon

Attacker is in Short Guard. The attacker rises into Falcon Guard and steps in to make a cut from above. Defender slopes forward and cuts *squalembretto* from Falcon Guard. As the attacker's blade passes out of danger, the defender's sword cuts down to the attacker's head.

2) Stop thrust

Both people are in Short Guard. The attacker raises arms and steps in to make a cut from above. Defender immediately thrusts his sword point into attacker's belly, sloping forward and to the right or left.

3) Boar's Tooth Deflection

Attacker is in Woman's Guard, defender in the Boar's Tooth. The attacker steps in to make a *squalembretto* or *fendente*. Defender pulls his sword up and across his body with no footwork and striking behind the attacker's sword, deflects it to the defender's right. This deflection is a *ridoppio* with the false edge. Once the deflection is completed, immediately come back with a *squalembretto* cut to the attacker's head, or neck.

4) Hanging Guard, cut to hands (outside hanger – step right with right foot)

Agent (attacker) is in Short Guard, the Patient (defender) is in the Half-Iron Door. The attacker raises arms and steps in to make a cut from above. The defender raises their hands into a left hanging parry (wrists are crossed) and slopes right with the right foot. At the time that the blades make contact, (edge of attacker to flat of defender) the defender makes a compass pace with the left foot, and *moulinets* into a cut to the wrists or forearms of the attacker.

*When stepping to the left to counter, slope with the left foot into the hanging parry, then compass back with the right and cut to the wrists.

5) Hanging Guard, cut to calf (inside hanger – step right with left foot)

Agent is in Short Guard, the Patient is in the Half-Iron Door. The attacker raises arms and steps in to make a cut from above. The defender drops the tip of the sword and raises their hands into a left hanging parry (wrists are crossed) and slopes right with the LEFT foot. At the time that the blades make contact, (edge of attacker to flat of defender) the defender slopes right again with the RIGHT foot and makes a strong cut to the attacker's knee, or calf.

*When stepping to the left to counter, slope with the right foot into the hanging parry, then slope with the left and cut to the knee.

6) Counter from Half Iron Door

Attacker begins in Short Guard or Falcon Guard, defender in Half Iron Door. The attacker steps forward and cuts fendente. The defender traverses right, and cuts from below, targeting the attacker's wrist. The defender ends up in Falcon Guard, and cuts fendente to the attacker's head.

7) Counter from Full Iron Door

Attacker begins in Short Guard or Falcon Guard, defender in Full Iron Door. The attacker steps forward and cuts straight down from above (fendente). The defender at the same time starts a *slightly* angled arc from BELOW targeting the opponent's sword blade with his flat. The object is to slap the opponent's blade off line, and at the point of contact (over your head, or you're dead) the defender's blade turns into a downward cut to the opponent's skull.

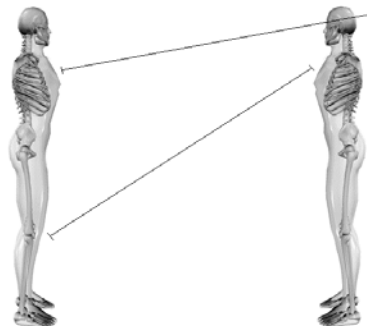
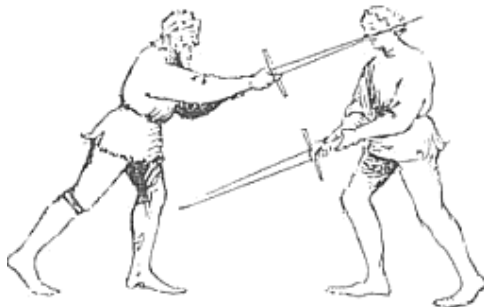
8) Counter from Tail Guard

Attacker begins in Short Guard or Falcon Guard, defender in Tail. The attacker steps forward and cuts straight down from above (fendente). The defender traverses right with the rear leg, avoiding the blade, and while compass pacing back with the left foot, moulinets into an angled downward cut (squalembretto) or a fendente to the attacker's wrists or hands.

5.2 Defenses against low line attacks

The myth of “guarding” your legs:

Many swordsmen have trouble when it comes to defending their legs in a sword fight. Mainly, this is due to the fact that people are trying to defend their low lines with their swords instead of with footwork. These techniques will help you to understand the concept of using distance to defend your legs, rather than your blade.



1) From Tail, cut to temple

Defender stands in tail guard, attacker is in tail. The defender has exposed his left leg, and put it in range of the attacker's blade. The attacker cuts tondo from tail, at the defender's leg. The defender pulls back his leg even with his rear leg. At the same time he makes a tondo cut to the attacker's temple. The defender's blow lands, but the attacker's falls short. This is because the distance needed to cover by the defender was from his shoulder to the attacker's head. The attacker has to cover from his shoulder to the defender's knee, a farther distance.

2) From Woman's Guard, cut to scalp

The defender starts in a Woman's guard and the attacker is in Tail or Woman's guard. The defender baits his left leg. The attacker goes for the leg, and the defender pulls it back, even with the rear leg, and makes a fendente cut to the attacker's head. Through quick footwork, and a good judge of distance, the defender strikes the attacker without being hit himself.

3) From Short, thrust to face

The attacker adopts a Tail guard or a Woman's guard. The defender is in Short. The attacker cuts to the defender's leg. The defender, thrusts from Short, into the attacker's face, or neck. Because the thrust is faster than the cut, the cut never lands. To illustrate this safely, when training, target the thrust NEXT TO the attackers head, and advance in while he cuts.

5.3 Basic thrust counters from short guard:

1) Press to Short Guard, counter thrust in Window

Both people are in Short Guard. The attacker then thrusts. The defender slopes right with the right foot, and parries the sword left, up into a left Window Guard. All that remains is a counter thrust by the defender, inbrocatta to the attacker's face, or throat.

2) Sloping step no parry, counter thrust

Based on #1, but harder to perform due to the fast nature of the thrust. Both people are in Short Guard. The attacker thrusts their blade forward. The defender slopes right (get that body out of the way) with the right foot, and immediately fires a stocatta counter-thrust to the attacker's belly.

3) Sloping step hand parry, counter thrust

Just like #2, with a slight modification. When the attacker thrusts to the defender's body, the defender slopes right, and takes their left hand off the sword. The defender offsets the attacker's blade with the back of their left hand. The right hand counter thrusts the sword to the attacker's armpit with a punta mandritta.

VI. Biographies of the Principle Italian Masters

Fiore dei Liberi-

Fiore dei Liberi of Premariacco was born sometime between 1340 and 1350 in Civitale del Friuli, a small town on the river Natisone in Italy. His birth year is estimated by the publication date of his treatise *Flos Duallatorum* (c.1409 – 1410) that tells us in the prologue that he had been practicing the art of swordsmanship for 50 years at that time.

Very little is known about Fiore dei Liberi, except for what is written in this prologue. He was of noble origin, the son of Sir Benedetto dei Liberi, a descendant of the nobles of Premariacco, but his direct line was not well placed. Fiore initially learned the art of swordsmanship as a child and young man in his village, from local men-at-arms (their exact station is unclear, though they appear to have been commoners) where he fought in friendly assaults and duels as was the local custom. In order to learn the art from the best of his time, he left his village and went to Germany to learn and train in swordsmanship under a variety of masters. “The scholar Johannes Suvenus (a former scholar of Nicolaus von Toblem)” was the only master he claims was important enough to mention. This “Johannes the Swabian” may have been the famous Johannes Liechtenauer, the Grandmaster of the entire German late medieval school of fighting, and whose method is similar, though not identical to Fiore’s.

Under Johannes’ direction, Fiore became a recognized Master-at-Arms, and he began to travel as a weapon-instructor throughout the southern Holy Roman Empire, and northern Italian states. He participated in numerous battles in and around Italy for the last 20 years of the 14th century. In 1383 he fought in Udine, fighting on the side of the town during a civil war, and he is there referred to as Seignuer, implying that at some point he had been knighted. In 1395 he was in Padua for a duel, and four years later in 1399 he was in Pavia.

Little is known of his life and deeds around this time until at the beginning of the 1400s, when he entered the court of Niccolo il d’Este, Marquise of Ferrara, as the instructor to the Marquise household knights and military advisor. He then began to write the manuscript for the nobility at the Signore di Ferrara request. In 1410 Fiore dedicated his treatise to the marquise, and after 1410 there are no records of his life or of his death. It is believed that he died some time before 1415.

Flos Duellatorum, or Flower of Battle is primarily composed of illustrations with short rhyming captions in Italian. The first section concerns wrestling, particularly against a knife-wielding opponent, and on dagger use. This section concludes with notes on dagger vs. sword. Then after another section dealing with sword and spear, Fiore turns his attention to the great sword, or Spadone. The great sword is between four and four and a half feet in length with a double-edged blade, a simple cross hilt, a plum-shaped pommel, and a handle long enough to be gripped with one or both hands. This weapon is surprisingly light (3 – 4 lbs.), and capable of making blindingly fast cuts and thrusts. As the plates illustrate, the entire sword is used, either by gripping the blade with the off-hand for strong half-sword attacks, or reversing it to strike with the pommel or to employ the hilt as a hammer to batter through the opponent’s defenses. Since the manuscript is written for trained knights, basic understanding is assumed, and Fiore concentrates on more specialized skills, such as disarms and close-combat techniques.

The next section focuses on armoured combat on foot, primarily with the sword and poleax. Finally, the manuscript ends with mounted combat with lance and sword, and fighting a mounted opponent from foot in single combat. Throughout the illustrations, the victor is clearly marked by a black garter around one leg, and the initiator of the technique wears a crown. Some illustrations

show a technique, and then in the next plate, the crown has switched heads, and the counter to the previous technique is now shown.

The vast majority of the illustrations concerned the spadone, which Master Fiore considered the key to all knightly combat. With this in mind, this course will look at the sword methods of Fiore dei Liberi, both at range and in the *giocco stretto* (close combat).

Vadi, Filippo

Works: *De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi* c1482 - 87

A native Pisan, Vadi is another northern Italian master who earned his living serving noblemen, traveling through the Italian city-states and the Holy Roman Empire learning the art of swordsmanship. He ultimately became the master-at-arms under Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, to whom his work is dedicated. His treatise is in two parts: one text and one plates with captions. While the plates and captions seem to be a re-working of dei Liberi, the text section is critically important, because the Pisan master addresses issues of timing, distance and measure, and the psychology of combat. This is one of the earliest discussions of the “higher principles” of swordplay.

Marozzo, Achille

Work: *Opera Nova*, 1536 and *Il Duello*, 1550

The preeminent Bolognese master of the first half of the 16th century, Marozzo’s *Opera Nova* is a massive work that details the spada di lato (the “cut-and-thrust” sword, a slimmer, more tapered version of the old medieval sword, usually equipped with some sort of complex hilt, and usually used with the index finger wrapped over the cross guard), sword and buckler, sword and dagger, sword and cloak, the two-handed sword, the dagger, the dagger and cloak, and polearms.